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Mine the riches of government Web sites



E-BIZ

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Sometimes it seems that governments don't understand the Internet and its critical importance for small business as the backbone of the emerging global wired economy. Yet there is at least one federal government department that does "get" the Net: Industry Canada.

It has been aggressively involved in creating a number of World Wide Web sites that serve to help, not hinder, business in Canada. Two in particular are tremendously useful to entrepreneurs.

First, Industry Canada has helped to create the Canada Business Service Centres series of Web sites with each province and territorial government (www.cbsc.org). They are among the best on-line Web sites for entrepreneurs.

The mission of the centres is "to improve the start-up, survival and growth rates of small and medium-sized enterprises by giving business people in every part of Canada access to accurate, timely and relevant information and referrals."

The quality of each provincial CBSC site varies, so you'll find that some contain more comprehensive information than others. As long as you aren't looking at province-specific material, you can browse any of the sites and discover useful information pertaining to starting, managing and enhancing a small business.

The B.C. site is one of the best. Click on "Web sites for small business" to discover many links with respect to starting up a business. The on-line small business workshop is also worth a visit.

Documents also abound in other areas — the Ontario site features a specific section on starting a small business in that province that concisely summarizes all of the issues than you will face.

Throughout the various CBSC sites, you can find information concerning intellectual property, exporting and business planning.

A second excellent site is Strategis (www.strategis.ic.gc.ca), the massive data base set up by Industry Canada. It's a bit difficult to describe because it contains so much diverse information. Industry Canada states that the purpose of the site is to make its information resources available to Canadians.

It seems to have done so — you can find extensive market research, company and industry directories, information about regulations affecting business in Canada, export materials, patent and trademark data bases and much more.

Strategis includes a strong small business emphasis — notably the Contact! data base. In here, you can browse through close to 600 articles related to small business issues and find a number of support organizations and other gems.

You could literally spend days in Strategis discovering what it offers on-line. There are detailed studies of industries, as well as information on related trade shows, major players, market forecasts and statistics.

There is so much in Strategis that it can seem complicated and difficult to master. But take the time to learn how to mine its riches.

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